**Good practice identified from Children’s Services Inspection**

The local authority is aware of its corporate parenting duties and there is a commitment to children in care and care leavers.

**Children in Care**

* When children need to come into care because of immediate risks, this is responded to quickly.
* When children cannot return to their parents’ care, early permanence plans are identified promptly. Children are placed with family members when this is appropriate.
* Most decisions for children to leave care and return home are appropriate.
* Children’s plans are timely, capture their views effectively and are regularly reviewed.
* Most children in care are visited regularly by social workers who know them well.
* Social workers develop positive relationships with children. A range of direct work tools are used to explore children’s wishes and feelings and to carry out life-story work. Most records are skilfully written to the child, giving them a clear understanding of why they are in care.
* Risks to children in care are usually promptly recognised and assessed.
* There are a range of emotional support services available for children in care.
* Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are supported by social workers who are sensitive to their cultural needs and experiences. Their placements mostly meet their needs well. They are encouraged to attend education, and resources are made available to support their cultural and social needs.
* The virtual school has ensured that the quality and timeliness of personal education plans (PEP) for children in care has improved.
* Children in care have a variety of hobbies and activities. They are supported by their carers to stay connected with important people in their lives. Family-time arrangements are made in line with children’s needs and wishes.
* Most children in care live in settled and stable arrangements with carers who understand and meet their needs well. When it is appropriate, they are placed with extended family members.
* A small number of children are placed at a distance from home when it is in their best interests. These children are visited regularly by social workers who find out their views to inform their care plans. They live in appropriate placements that meet their needs.
* Children are placed for adoption in a timely way and are placed with their siblings when this is appropriate. Introductions are undertaken in a structured and sensitive way. Life-story books and later-life letters are sensitively written.

**Care Leavers**

* Personal advisers (PAs) are strong advocates for the young people they work with. They are allocated in a timely way to allow for relationships to develop before the young people leave care. PAs know their young people well and are dedicated to improving their lives. For most care leavers, consideration is given to individual needs and any impact family history or experiences may have on them. PAs are alert to issues of domestic abuse, criminal exploitation and risks associated with poor mental health. Risks are quickly identified, assessed, and reviewed by PAs, who take effective action to promote young people’s safety.
* Care leavers in Wirral trust their PAs and feel listened to.
* Most PAs visit young people regularly, at a frequency that meets their needs, and use a variety of communication methods to stay connected to them. Care leavers aged over 21 continue to receive support from their PAs when they still have a need and want the support to continue.
* Most young people have detailed pathway plans that capture their views once they turn 18. Plans identify risks appropriately and are written to support young people to understand their progress. Most plans are drawn up with young people and include the input of other agencies. Pathway plans are mostly updated to reflect changes, and this supports young people to know what help is available to them and who is going to do what.
* Care leavers have a warm and welcoming safe space where they can meet, socialise, attend groups, celebrate successes, and access support from their PAs, who are based there. The provision of a social supermarket also supports the young people in their daily lives to buy essentials at prices they can afford.
* Care leavers are supported to access funding to purchase the essential things they may need in life.
* Most care leavers are in good physical health and have their health needs met.
* Disabled care leavers are supported effectively, to ensure their health needs are well understood and met, and this support continues with thorough pathway planning beyond the age of 21. Careful consideration is given to supporting positive relationships with family and friends.
* Most unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who become care leavers receive a good level of support, including practical and emotional well-being support. Careful consideration is given to ensuring that they can access local amenities to support their cultural and identity needs.
* There is a dedicated employability team, and effective arrangements are in place to ensure that care leavers are supported to pursue employment, education or training opportunities. PAs emphasise this and are ambitious for young people.
* Most care leavers live in accommodation that is safe and supports their needs.
* Care leavers receive advice and support from PAs about accessing their care records, to help them understand their histories and experiences. They have access to key documents, including their passports, birth certificates and national insurance numbers, enabling them to access leisure, employment, housing and education opportunities.

**What needs to improve:**

* The response to 16- and 17-year-old homeless children. We need to ensure that they are made aware of their rights and what they entitled to.
* Private fostering arrangements are undeveloped. We need to increase awareness and identity of those children who live in private fostering arrangements to make sure they are safe.
* We need to improve the quality of decision-making so that children enter care on time.
* Make sure that permanence plans for children progress on time to avoid unnecessary intervention by the law.
* IROs should challenge and question plans for children more forcefully.
* We need to plan for the transition of 16- and 17-year-old children in care to help them feel more ready to leave care.
* We need to make sure that the offer to care leavers is always accessible and understood so that all care leavers receive what they are entitled to.